

Mayor Rejects Council's Directives

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In what politicians say is a first in Hartford since the city's new charter took effect last year, Mayor Eddie A. Perez has vetoed two directives by the city council.

The veto - referred to in the charter as a statement of disapproval - nullifies the council's request last week that the mayor investigate two cases of alleged police brutality.

But it also marks a rare moment of miscommunication between the mayor and the city council, which is largely seen as under his control.

"He hasn't vetoed anything [until now]," council minority leader Robert Painter said Monday.

Perez explained his veto in a written statement, which is required by the charter. He said the council overstepped its authority.

"Council may pass laws and budgets," the statement says. "It may not order the mayor to take certain executive actions."

Perez said there were other things that troubled him about the council's resolution. For one, the mayor's office is not the proper outlet to handle police complaints, he said. That is the domain of bodies such as the civilian police review board and the city's Firearms Discharge Board of Inquiry, which reviewed one of the cases referred to the mayor's office.

Second, the mayor said, even if he were to look into the matter, the council failed to clarify what exactly it wants him to do.

"What am I investigating? What's the scope?" Perez said. "I bet you can get nine different answers from nine different council people. I don't know the extent of what I'm supposed to do."

The mayor, in his written decision, alludes to council members "eager to score quick political points" through the requests to investigate.

If you ask the sponsor of the resolutions, Councilman Kenneth H. Kennedy, the mayor was supposed to "find the truth." Kennedy said that means determining whether police had reason to shoot one man four times and why a homeless man was "beaten up" as

officers tried to move him from a shelter to a hospital.

Painter, who amended the resolution to make it appeal to other members of the council, said he took a more limited view.

"My intent was to ask the mayor to be sure that the procedures and policy were followed," Painter said. "We were definitely not asking him to do an investigation. That's not his job."

Painter said it was reasonable for the mayor to look into whether the agencies that exist to probe these matters did their job thoroughly - but not to redo their investigation. But if the council were to look at creating a new policy, Painter proposed that all police cases presented for litigation to the city be automatically referred to the civilian police review board.

The cases of alleged brutality each came to the city's attention in different ways. The case of Kendall J. Williams, a homeless man who suffered a fractured leg and facial scarring from an altercation last year with police officers, arose as a legal complaint against the city, which was settled in July for \$30,000.

The other case involved Ignacio Vilchel, who was shot four times by police who went to his apartment to arrest him on drug charges in March 2003. Vilchel, who was sentenced last month to 20 years in prison, was armed as he approached the three plainclothes officers outside his apartment. He claims he thought they were intruders.

The Firearms Discharge Board of Inquiry reviewed the case and decided the police shooting was justified - if not necessarily in accordance with police guidelines. But two members of that board say the police department withheld key information needed to fairly analyze the case.

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